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# Temple Beth-El

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# Temple Beth-El

by Kennedy Hall

On Sunday September 22, 2015 I visited the Jewish worship center, Temple Beth-El located at 601 North Parham Rd., Henrico VA 23229, for their 9am morning minyan service. The service was presided over by Rabi Michael Knopf and Hazzan Marian Turk.

The Temple was a large brick building with a covered walkway leading to the front door. The inside of the building with simply decorated. The floor was white tile. To the left of the entrance was a long hallway of offices and schoolrooms for children's classes. To the right of the entrance was the main worship room. It was a little small. There were only three rows plastic chairs and it was lit brightly.

As a visitor, I felt like I was very welcomed. As soon as I walked in the door a member of the congregation asked if they could help me and showed me around the building. He then introduced me to the Rabbi, who introduced me to the whole congregation and welcomed me numerous times throughout the morning. He also invited me to sit at the table at the back of the room so that I could take notes on what was going on throughout the service.

The congregation was small, at least at the Sunday morning service. There were only ten to fifteen people present. The congregation consisted of mainly older, white, middle class males. There were a couple of women present, so appeared to be the wives of some of the men in the room.

I felt very comfortable attending the service. Everyone was friendly and welcoming. Many members told me to please come ask them questions after the service if I had any. Rabbi Gary offered to stay with me in the back of the room. He stayed nearby and explained every prayer and ritual that went on during the service. Most of the service was in Hebrew so he translated the prayers for me.

The service begins with everyone standing and reciting a prayer that thanks God for another new day. In the ancient times, this prayer was recited daily by the Jews when they woke in the morning. Then everyone sat down and silently meditated on a verse from Genesis. Everyone then stood again and recited the prayer, Kaddish D'Rabbanon, asking for blessings for the teachers and students of the Torah. While this prayer was recited everyone bowed left, then right, and then to the front of the room. Everyone sat again and meditated on a reading from Psalm. A prayer of mourning and remembrance of those passed was next. The congregation then recited a Psalm of praise aloud, which was followed by silent meditation on readings from Nehemiah, which follows the history of the Jews, and readings about the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. This was followed by the reading of a poem written by Judah Halevi. This was the first thing read aloud in English. The Hatzki Kaddish prayer was then read, which gives praises to God, followed by the K'Riat Shema and it's B'rakhot,

which is about the creation of the sun and moon and all of the heavenly bodies. There was a lot of emphasis on light and creation in this prayer because this was a morning service. Then, there was a prayer asking God to teach us to study and obey the commandment, which is followed by a reading of the ten commandments. The prayer K'Riat Sh'ma is then read, which comes from Deuteronomy and summarizes the foundation of Judaism - that there is only one God and if you believe this you will find favor. Everyone then sang from Exodus 15, which is about how God is faithful for saving their ancestors from Egypt. There are then silent prayers, which are known as the greedy prayers. This is the time when you ask for things like wisdom, forgiveness, blessings, healing, keeping enemies from defeating us, asking for the safety of Jerusalem, prayers for the Jewish holidays, help us to be truthful, humble, and to praise God in all things. There was then a pause for announcements and the Rabbi told everyone to go with "Godspeed." This was followed by the concluding prayers of the service. The first was Ashrei, which is from Psalm 84, 144, and 115. The second was the Kaddish Shalem, which is said while standing, and that is followed by Aleinu and Mourners Kaddish. Finally, Psalm 24 was read, which asks for God to bring peace. This prayer is read on Sundays only.

The emotional tone of the service was very serious and reflective. The opening of the service seemed to be casual. Everyone just stood and read a prayer, the same prayer that starts every service. The congregational participation seemed to be more reserved. Some people stood without saying the prayers and many mumbled the prayers softly. The service was highly ritualistic. The same prayers and scriptures were read in the same order that

they are every week. Some people in the congregation knew the prayers so well they didn't even have to read them from the book anymore. Also, in order to have a morning minyan, ten people must be present. The service ended with announcements, the Rabbi telling everyone to go with "Godspeed," and then the reading of the concluding prayers.

Some symbols included the Menorah, the Star of David, and Yamakas. Also, the rabbis wore prayer shawls, in which the fringes on the bottom, called tzitzit, are to remind you of the ten commandments in hopes that you will follow them. Some members also wore a prayer box on their forehead, which can come in necklace form too and is also hung above doors in the home, and that is to symbolize the prayer that God is the only God. Also, two of the Rabbis participated in tefillah of the arm, in which a band is wrapped around the forearm seven times and then around the middle finger twice, which is a symbol of God delivering the people from Egypt. •

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